



Feinstein, Akaka Seek Better Disease,  
Bioterror Surveillance and Defense  
October 7, 2004

**Washington, DC** – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI) have asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review the disease reporting infrastructure and capabilities of Federal agencies and assess their ability to expand domestic disease reporting internationally.

In their request to Comptroller General David M. Walker, the Senators wrote, "Given the impact that global infectious diseases, whether naturally occurring or as the result of a bioterror attack, may have on the public health and economy of the United States, we request that the Government Accountability Office review the disease reporting infrastructure and capabilities of Federal agencies and assess their ability to expand domestic disease reporting internationally."

**"We learned how vulnerable our nation is to the threat of bioterrorism firsthand when anthrax was sent to Senator Tom Daschle's Washington, DC office in October 2001,"** Senator Feinstein said. **"To prevent more bioterror attacks, we need to carefully collect data about diseases occurring both domestically and abroad. A GAO review of our disease reporting capacity will help us establish a more uniform system of domestic and international disease surveillance."**

**"A more effective international disease surveillance system is essential for global security both against a bioterrorist attack or a naturally occurring disease,"** Akaka said. **"We believe that the United States must strengthen its ability to detect diseases before our borders are breached. We are woefully behind in this international effort."**

The 2000 National Intelligence Estimate noted that many infectious diseases, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the West Nile virus, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), originated outside of the United States. An April 2004 report of the Government Accountability Office, "Asian SARS Outbreak Challenged International and National Responses," (GAO-04-564) noted that the response by governments in SARS-affected countries is hindered by inadequate disease surveillance systems, poor communication, ineffective leadership, and insufficient public health capacity.

The report requested by Senators Feinstein and Akaka would examine methods of improving current programs and propose new areas for the United States to strengthen its ability to detect diseases before entering the United States. The agencies and departments to be examined include the Departments of State, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.